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SUBJECT: FIRST FORUM OF THE UN ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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[1](#)I. 2006 ISTANBUL 2084

[1](#)J. 2005 MADRID 960

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Aguirre represented Secretary Rice at the opening ceremonies of the First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) in Madrid January 15-16. UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon, President Zapatero, President Erdogan of Turkey, and AoC High Representative Jorge Sampaio inaugurated the Forum, with Erdogan announcing that Turkey would host the second forum in 2009. Other high-level attendees included President Turk of Slovenia, President Wade of Senegal, Algerian PM Belkhadem, Finland President Jalonon, Malaysian PM Badawi, EU High Rep for CFSP Javier Solana, Queen Noor of Jordan, Qatari First Lady Mozah bint Nasser, OIC Sec Gen Ihsanoglu, Arab League SecGen Amr Moussa, Iberoamerican SecGen Enrique Iglesias, Prince al-Hussaini of Aga Khan, and UNESCO DG Matsuura. The combination talkshop-ministerial yielded two significant financial commitments - a USD 100 million AoC Media Fund announced by Queen Noor and a 100 million euro youth employment initiative announced by the Qatari first lady. Sampaio concluded ten other agreements with foundations and international organizations to collaborate on intercultural dialogue and tolerance initiatives. A large body of participants/speakers praised the initiative with some taking the opportunity to launch potshots at U.S. foreign policy and perceived double standards of the West. The separate high-level political dialogue comprised 66 interventions, approximately three-fourths of which were delivered by secretaries general, ministers or deputy ministers. All but two of the

interventions focused on what their respective countries are doing to improve diversity, religious tolerance, education, and integration. Iranian Deputy FM for Europe Ali Bagheri spoke about "some countries" and "some people" whose self indulgence, rampant violence, double standards, and abuse of freedom of expression indicated the weakness and decline of their civilizations. The Palestinian Delegate in Madrid, Musa Amer Odeh, gave a long, vehement address that criticized the January 15 IDF incursion in Gaza and complained of Israeli non-compliance with UN resolutions. Syria did not participate, the Israeli bilat ambassador attended half of the session, and the U.S. was present for the entire session but did not intervene. Post will report on domestic political impact and implications on the bilateral relationship septel. END SUMMARY.

//OPENING SESSION//

12. (U) Ambassador Aguirre represented Secretary Rice at the opening session of the First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations on January 15, accompanied by the DCM. Seven heads of government, approximately 30 ministers, representatives from approximately 30 other nations and authorities, and secretaries general of a dozen international organizations, including the Arab League, the OIC, the OSCE, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, attended. All P-5 and G-8 nations were present. A fuller list of state delegates appears below. Representatives from major corporations (including GE and Siemens), media outlets (including Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya), think tanks, and private foundations (Carnegie, Aga Khan) also attended the open sessions, along with a broad spectrum of religious leaders and human rights activists.

13. (U) President Zapatero convened the Forum by stating that the goal of the Alliance of Civilizations was to bolster, empower, and unite the vast majority of the world's citizens

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who prefer tolerance, diversity, and peace over religious extremism, terrorism and cultural misunderstanding. He noted the four pillars of the AoC - education, youth, immigration, and media - and announced that the GOS had approved a national plan with 60 projects and initiatives that would impact both domestic and foreign policy. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan discussed Turkey's national plan and used the occasion to advocate for Turkish accession to the EU as a positive step to bridging the divide between majority Islamic nations and the West. He also railed against religious intolerance while praising Turkey's tolerant, democratic, predominantly Muslim society. Erdogan emphasized the importance of providing youth with education and access to unbiased media, and he concluded by inviting attendees to join him in Istanbul for the second forum in 2009. UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon said, "Never in our lifetimes has there been a more desperate need for constructive dialogue among nations, cultures, and communities." He praised the leadership of High Rep Sampaio, and said that the efforts of the AoC would compliment UN efforts to implement its counter-terrorism strategy adopted in the General Assembly. He also said that the AoC's most important contribution would be to instill a real sense of our common humanity at the local, national, and regional levels. AoC High Representative and former Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio's emphasized that the AoC was "the right initiative at the right moment to fill a gap at the international level," and he said that he and SYG Ban had oriented the AoC toward action and the achievement of results.

//ANNOUNCEMENTS//

14. (U) Qatari First Lady Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned announced the creation of a 100 million euro initiative called Silatech to employ young people in North Africa and the Middle East. She called on national leaders to make youth employment a major international priority.

Queen Noor of Jordan announced a USD 100 million AoC Media Fund, of which she is a founding board member, for the production and distribution of films and programs that enhance cultural understanding. Partners in this initiative include Sir Richard Branson, Participant Productions (Syriana, Kite Runner, An Inconvenient Truth), YouTube (which will create an AoC channel on its site), film distributor Summit Entertainment, and International Creative Management (one of the world's largest talent agencies). Sampaio signed MoU's with UNESCO, the Arab League, ISESCO, ALESCO, and United Cities, as well as an LoI with the Council of Europe. The AoC announced the official launch of three initiatives, a rapid response media mechanism designed to put media in contact with appropriate issue experts in times of international crisis, an on-line clearinghouse which will catalog ongoing programs and projects in conjunction with partner governments and major universities, and a youth solidarity fund to provide scholarships and grants for youth programs, intercultural exchanges, and young people's media.

//HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE//

15. (C) Sampaio billed the High Level Political Dialogue, which was closed to the press, as an informal discussion of ways to move the AoC forward, inviting participant states to elaborate on ways to implement the AoC goals going forward. The end result was a plenary session with 66 four-minute interventions, almost all of which expressed support for the AoC, detailed with varying levels of specificity what each nation was doing with respect to AoC goals, and expressed full commitment to the initiative. No delegations announced major financial contributions, although Luxembourg made a 100,000 euro pledge to the voluntary trust fund. FM Moratinos announced that Spain would host a World Youth Encounter in Cordoba. Dutch FM Verhagen said, "torture is not acceptable under any circumstances," and he called for religious freedom for Christians in the Arabian Peninsula. Brazilian Justice Minister Genro offered to host the third AoC Forum in 2010. Bulgarian Deputy FM Kalfin mentioned the importance of the future of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

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Russian Deputy FM Yakovenko repeated the Russian proposal for a Consultative Council of Religions in the General Assembly. British Secretary of State for International Cooperation Shahid Malik said, "The war on terror is doomed to failure without a parallel war on the root causes." The OIC representative called for withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. The Pakistani ambassador focused on the spread of Islamophobia in the world, likening it to Anti-Semitism.

//IRAN AND PALESTINIAN DELEGATE//

16. (C) Iranian Deputy FM Ali Bagheri began by noting that Iran is one of the cradles of civilization and has endured as a civilization, while others have declined due to their self-indulgence and failure to pay attention to justice. "Some people" and "some nations" practice double standards and rampant violence, uprooting millions in the Middle East. The abuse of the right to freedom of expression is not civilized and is a sign of weakness and decline in a civilization. He proposed the establishment of a committee of eminent persons to combat the denigration of values and to make recommendations to the Alliance on how to combat these trends, as well as offering to organize a world congress of youth parliaments in Tehran.

17. (C) The Palestinian bilateral delegate Musa Amer Odeh did not ingratiate himself, delivering an address that more than doubled the allotted speaking time toward the end of the already interminable session. He said that Palestine was constantly under attack, and that their opponents wanted them to disappear. Palestinian land had been occupied for over 42 years, and there are over 5 million Palestinian refugees.

The Middle East conflict is not a religious conflict but one of colonization. The world has not enforced UNSC resolution 242, settlements are continuing, there is an illegal border wall, and fifty two percent of Palestinian land has been taken away. There are 12,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, including many minors, and the Israeli occupation has included the legitimization of torture. Major world powers protect Israel and uphold their claims in defiance of UN resolutions. Israel flees from its obligations, and always talks about Israeli security, but never about Palestinian security. There can be no peace without justice and no peace without independence. Odeh also condemned the January 15 IDF attack in Nablus which produced 19 "martyrs" and 59 wounded. He affirmed the PA's commitment to the goals of the AoC and thanked the Spanish for organizing the forum.

//TALKSHOP//

18. (U) The remainder of the program consisted of three "plenary sessions" and eight "working sessions." Five major themes ran through all of the sessions. First, the media both in predominantly Islamic nations and in the West were perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions about the others because sensationalism was the easiest story to sell. Second, without progress in the Israeli-Palestinian question, no amount of dialogue could succeed. Third, the AoC can be a positive force if it can give a voice to the overwhelming majority of people who want peace and tolerance. Fourth, religions are not the problem; international actors are manipulating religion in fighting political battles. Fifth, the term "war on terror" is ineffective and counterproductive.

19. (U) In the first plenary session entitled "Managing Diversity in the Era of Globalization," former Irish PM Mary Robinson and former Norwegian President Bondevik criticized the term "War on Terror" as counterproductive, saying that it was being misconstrued internationally as a war on Islam and that it promoted a dynamic of opposition between the U.S. and citizens of Arab and predominantly Muslim nations. Slovenian President Turk said that humiliation and the loss of dignity of persons in the Palestinian territories and elsewhere in the Middle East was one of the root causes of extremism in

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the region. He noted the perception in the region of the West applying double standards on human rights and even on the enrichment of uranium. Javier Solana said that the globalized world is experiencing a resurgence of ethnic and cultural identities in opposition to western modernity which, while not a problem in itself, made it easy for bad actors to manipulate cultural differences to sinister ends. In response, the world needed to further embrace and celebrate cultural and religious diversity to eliminate extremists' ability to exploit differences. Sheikha Nasser of Qatar said that the Muslim world is producing terrorism as a product of humiliation and poverty, as well as dissatisfaction with political problems such as the MEPP, Iraq, and Afghanistan. She acknowledged that governments in the region were not doing nearly enough.

110. (U) The second and most politicized session, entitled "Political Challenges to Building Cross-Cultural Understanding", included discussion of President Bush's trip to the Middle East. Spanish FM Moratinos said that Spain wanted the AoC to play a part in eliminating stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings in the Middle East. He said that the Middle East faced a lack of political and individual will for progress, and that the AoC could work on increasing the individual will, while the EU and others must do more to work on the political will. Iranian Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi was critical of the U.S., noting recent arms sales in the Arabian peninsula and saying that the international concept of the "clash of civilizations" was created by the U.S. because the U.S. needed a new enemy in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Algerian PM Belkhadem said

that democracy is not a commodity that can be exported or flown into a country. He said that the Mideast conflict was causing the entire Muslim world to feel the injustice of the Palestinian occupation and the war in Iraq. Gareth Evans, Secretary General of the International Crisis Group, pointed

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out that the United States is no more a monolith than the Arab world by awkwardly contrasting presidential candidates Mike Huckabee and Barack Obama. He also drew loud applause when he said, "The U.S. population needs to get serious about electing a government that will be even-handed."

¶11. (U) The third and least dynamic plenary, entitled "From Global Talk to Local Action," included the mayors of Madrid, Cordoba, Barcelona, Paris, Istanbul, and Cairo, along with renowned authors Paulo Coelho and Wole Soyinka. Coelho and Soyinka delivered engaging remarks replete with anecdotes of small-scale engagement, while the mayors stuck more to formulaic elaboration of how their cities were handling diversity. Madrid Mayor Gallardon participated but was clearly unprepared and distracted by the morning's headlines that he had been effectively banished from national politics by Popular Party leader Mariano Rajoy.

¶12. (U) Emboffs attended several of the smaller working sessions, including sessions entitled, "Engaging the Corporate Sector in the AoC," "The Role of Religious Leaders and Communities in Promoting Shared Security," "Innovative Uses of Mass Media to Promote Cross Cultural Understanding," and "Youth Approaches to Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue." Participants emphasized the overall message that media outlets and civil society, in particular religious leaders and youth groups, have a strong role to play and have more credibility at the grass roots level than national politicians. As such, they must be brought into political discussions both internationally and locally.

//COMMENT//

¶13. (C) The healthy mix of state delegates and participants - state and non-state actors, private citizens, foundations, religious leaders, minor celebrities and royalty - made for a fairly animated and enthusiastic dynamic as well as a colorful crowd. The informal discussion format, combining government leaders such as Turk, Jalonen, Wade, and Solana with opinion makers and private citizens, made for an informal and candid discussion at times. Some non-state

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participants aired overt and oblique criticisms of U.S. foreign policy, though most participants sought to keep their comments focused on the goals of the AoC. Almost every speaker and panel acknowledged the importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian question, while few took the occasion to criticize Israel. The HLPD could have used more controversy in fact; only two moments of genuine emotion punctuated six hours of mind-numbingly earnest speeches on tolerance, diversity, and support for the AoC. Coming as they did toward the end of the session after countless expressions of support for diversity and tolerance and a willingness to engage, the speeches by Iran and the PA struck a discordant tone, though delivered to a mostly empty room.
END COMMENT.

//DETAILS//

¶14. (U) Participants received several documents, including the Terms of Reference of the AoC Voluntary Trust Fund, a summary of contributions and pledges, an AoC org chart, a description of AoC officer responsibilities, and Forum participant lists, which post will pouch to IO/UNP.

//PARTICIPATING STATES//

¶15. (U) Following is an incomplete list of heads of

delegation of participating states, authorities, and IOs (* indicates membership in Group of Friends):

AoC - High Rep Sampaio
* Afghanistan - FM Spanta
* Albania - FM Basha
* ALESCO - DG Bousnina
* Algeria - PM Belkhadem
* Arab League - Deputy SecGen ben Helli
* Argentina - FM Taiana
* Australia - Bilat Amb. Campbell
* Austria - FM Plassnik
* Belgium - Bilat Amb. Rijmenans
* Brazil - Justice Minister Genro
* Bulgaria - Deputy PM Kalfin
Canada - Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Obhrai
* China - Bilat Amb. Qiu Xiaoqi
* Council of Europe - SecGen Terry Davis
Cyprus - Bilat Amb. Yiordamlis
* Denmark - FM Moller
* Egypt - Culture Minister Farouk Hosni
Ethiopia - Bilat Amb.
* European Commission - Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner
* Finland - President Jalonon
* France - Spec. Amb. for Cultural Affairs Donnedieu de Vabres
* Germany - Spec. Amb. for Intercultural Dialogue Tempel
* Greece - Deputy FM Yannis Valinakis
* Hungary - FM Goncz
Iberoamerican Secretariat - SecGen Enrique Iglesias
* India - Bilat Amb. Tripathi
* Indonesia - Bilat Amb. Mustafa
* ISESCO - DG Altwaijri
Israel - Bilat Amb. Schutz
* Iran - Deputy FM for Europe Ali Bagheri
* Italy - Youth and Sports Minister Melandri
* Japan - Bilat Amb. Yoshikawa
* Jordan - Culture Minister Bakir
* Kazakhstan - Deputy FM Kazykhanov
* Latin Union - SecGen Osio
* Lithuania - FM Vaitekunas
* Luxembourg - Deputy PM Asselborn
Macedonia - FM Milososki
* Malaysia - PM Badawi
Mauritania - FM Lemine
* Mexico - Culture Minister Vela
* Montenegro - FM Rocen
* Morocco - Minister of Islamic Affairs Toufiq
* Mozambique - Culture Minister Ali
* Netherlands - FM Verhagen
* New Zealand - Ethnic Affairs Minister Carter
Nigeria - Bilat Amb. Ginsau

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* Norway - SecState for Development Gulbrandsen
* OIC - SecGen Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
* OSCE - SecGen de Brichambaut
* Pakistan - Ambassador to UN-Geneva Khan
* Peru - Bilat Amb. Sanchez-Cerro
* Philippines - FM Romulo
* Poland - Senate Foreign Affairs Commission Pres. Kieres
* Portugal - FM Amado
* Qatar - First lady Mozah bint Nasser al Missned
* Romania - FM Cioroianu
* Russian Federation - Deputy FM Yakovenko
Saudi Arabia - Bilat Amb. Abdulaziz al Saud
* Senegal - President Wade
* Serbia - FM Jeremic
* South Korea - FM Min-soon Song
* Slovenia - President Turk
* Spain - President Zapatero
* Sweden - FM Malmstrom
* Switzerland - FM Micheline Calmy-Rey
* Syria - not present at HLPD
* Thailand - Special Envoy Xuto
* Tunisia -
* Turkey - PM Erdogan

* UAE - Culture Minister Al Owais
UN - SYG Ban Ki-Moon
* UNESCO - SecGen Matsuura
* Ukraine - Deputy FM Veselovsky
* United Cities - SecGen Gateau
* United Kingdom - SecState for Int'l Cooperation Shahid Malik
United States - Bilat Amb. Aguirre
* Yemen - FM Al Qirbi
Palestinian Authority - Bilat Delegate Musa Amer Odeh
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